

The Honorable Gregory H. Woods
United States District Court
Southern District of New York
Daniel Patrick Moynihan United States Courthouse
500 Pearl Street, Room 2260
New York, NY 10007-1312

August 17th, 2022
via ECF

Re: United States v. Kromah: 19-cr-00338-GHW-1

Dear Judge Woods,

Thank you for the opportunity to address you in this manner and to hopefully give you some information about myself and the circumstances that led me to make the mistakes which bring me before you. There is no excuse for committing any crime, but especially crimes that enacted against completely innocent victims. I know this, and I have no intention for this letter to become a pointless attempt to excuse or justify of my actions or negate any guilt on my part. Instead, I am writing this with the hope that you can find mercy and leniency in your sentence after learning about the unfortunate circumstances that I have faced throughout my life.

My life has been very difficult, to say the least. In 1990, I became the sole survivor of my family during a horrible period in Liberia's history marred by genocide. I was fortunate enough to have been spared my family's fate thanks to the efforts of my uncle, who had a keen eye for the trouble that was brewing in Liberia. In 1989, this uncle convinced me to leave my hometown for the safety of a UN refugee camp located in Guinea. I was given some money from my family to help look after myself and I said my good-byes to my family not knowing at the time that I would never see any of them ever again. For a year, I waited for the "green light" from my family to return to Liberia. I spent this time hoping and praying for their safety. Then, the news reached me at the UN refugee camp that a single massacre had wiped out my entire family along with the rest of my village. A part of me died that day, a part of me that has never recovered from the news that still haunts me to this day.

The living conditions at the UN refugee camp were extraordinarily harsh. We lived in cramped tents in a mosquito-infested campsite. I felt hopeless and helpless there. After the news came, I felt as though I was at the end of my rope. I contemplated suicide quite a lot during this interval of time. However, I found a source of much needed inspiration in the examples set by the refugees who were leaving the UN camp and setting off for better opportunities elsewhere in Africa, specifically South Africa. The idea of leaving the UN refugee camp and going on a similar journey was daunting, but I knew that I needed to do it anyways. My sanity was on the line, and I needed to act now.

I left the camp with several other refugees in 1991 and headed from Guinea to the Indian Ocean, where I hoped to find safe passage to South Africa. I walked—and took buses whenever possible—across the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Central Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Uganda. I found temporary shelter in mosques where the hospitality of friendly Muslims helped keep me alive. When I reached Kampala, Uganda in January 1992, I brought my one-year trans-African trek to a sudden and abrupt end. I found work to support myself

and started a family there. Still, despite my best efforts, I rarely earned enough to support myself, let alone my family, each year. By 2016, I had seven family members to support, including three children whom I had adopted from my fellow Liberian tribesmen.

In an effort to provide for my family, I sought out other opportunities to gain income. This pursuit of income ultimately led me to some unsavory characters who promised me the ability to earn large sums of money. I was a small part of a much larger organization in Uganda. At the height of my involvement, between 2016 and 2017, I was only netting less than what most Americans make in 3 or 4 months of work. And yet, this was still life changing money for my family. Of course, this money was temporary and would have only helped us so much in the long term.

I was poor before this, and I am poor now—though I am richer in knowledge. I have come to see the error of what I did. Growing up in Africa, I was taught and have always had the greatest respect for wildlife and the natural world. I am ashamed and humiliated by my willing participation in the baseless slaughter of a beautiful animal. It is true that I was desperate for money, and I had reason enough to want money, but I stooped to such a state of lowness in my haste and naivete. The trafficking of rhinoceros horns is plainly regardless of how profitable and/or prestigious the trade can be for some individuals because, at the end of the day, these gains will always be made at the detriment and suffering of innocent creatures. I wish I could have realized this earlier, but I was blinded by the temporary monetary relief that the trade provided my family. Whatever relief I gave my family through my participation in the trafficking trade has since been outweighed by the harm that has befall them on account of my actions. I wish that I could have changed a lot of the things that I did. Among my many regrets, I wish that I could have found a legitimate way to help my family back then.

I was arrested by the local Ugandan police in 2019 and placed in jail. The conditions at this jail were terrible and incredibly inhumane. We did not enjoy civil rights as inmates there. When there finally seemed to be light at the end of the tunnel for me and there was growing possibility that I would be released from the Ugandan jail, I was seized by American agents who flew me to New York. As soon as I touched down in the United States, I was delivered to the prison called MCC Manhattan.

Without spending undue time here discussing the conditions at either MCC Manhattan or MDC Brooklyn—as you, and all other judges in the Eastern and Southern Districts, are already aware of this—I will inform you that my continued incarceration over the years has plagued me psychologically. The loss I suffered when I lost my family to wanton violence has never left me. I tried my best to heal, and, in some ways, I did heal in the company of my wife and children. I am separated from them, and the same feelings of loss and personal tragedy have begun to surface again.

I understand the need for me to be punished for the crimes I have committed—I absolutely do. I have been incarcerated and separated from my family for nearly five years and counting. In that time, I have accepted responsibility for what I have done. I have—I believe—repaid my debt to society, and I have, once again, lost everything that ever mattered to me in my life. I have learned that offers of easily obtained money should be avoided, and that there are honest and better ways to support one’s family. I have paid an incredible price in my life for things that I did not do, now

I am paying for something that I did in fact do. That said, I truly believe, that at this point, I have rehabilitated and learned my lesson and paid the appropriate price for the crimes I have committed.

It is for these reasons that I humbly beg your Honor to have mercy on me and to allow me to be reunited with my family and to try to build a new life with them that honest. There has been so much tragedy and sadness in my life—some caused by my own actions, I readily admit. I beg your Honor to please have mercy and compassion for me and show me leniency. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Moazu Kromah

Moazu Kromah #86956-054